

# USDAnews

USDA's Employee News Publication—For You & About You!

## Six Months Later We're Still Onsite, Volunteers Aiding Gulf Coast Hurricane Victims

by Patricia Klintberg  
Office of Communications

In the Sept.-Oct. 2005 issue of the **USDA NEWS**, readers learned about the extraordinary outpouring of assistance from USDA employees to other employees and civilians in the immediate aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

But that assistance was not short-lived. It continues today.

After he returned from a firsthand look at the devastation in October 2005, Secretary **Mike Johanns** offered Lt. Gen. **Carl Strock**, Chief, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) additional personnel to help with its missions of debris removal, public affairs, and roof protection of damaged houses.

Coordinated out of USDA's Office of Operations, as of April 2006 over 100 USDA employees from 32 states had been deployed primarily to Louisiana, working 12-hour days, seven days a week, often thrust into jobs above their pay grades and outside any previous experience. Most wanted to do it again—and many did extend their tours beyond the initial 30 days, thanks to sympathetic supervisors.

Coping with the devastated landscape was a bigger challenge for many than being away from families and home. Hurricanes Katrina and Rita covered 87,000 square miles with debris,

an area about the size of Great Britain and three times greater than the destruction left by any previous storm.

The volunteers have described their tours of duty as humbling, inspiring, meaningful, rewarding, and an honor. Yet for many that sense of contribution and pride at a job well done is tinged with dismay at leaving the work undone.

"It is the most rewarding thing I have done so far, but also the most depressing. It is when you return that it hits you," said **Maria Tupac**, a commodity program specialist with the Farm Service Agency's Kansas City Commodity Office in Kansas City, Mo. "When you are there you work 12-hour days, eat, and go to sleep and do it all over again. But over time, as you encounter the same devastation day after day, you begin to get used to it. Only when you are back in your usual environment does it hit you. And people don't understand what you've seen, the magnitude of it."

She was a Quality Assurance (QA) Inspector for construction and demolition debris removal in the towns of Slidell and Pearl River, located in the southeast corner of Louisiana. "I drove around and made estimates of the debris and I made sure the crews were paying attention to the regulations—especially as they dealt with private property,"



Dwarfed by a literal mountain of debris, Rural Development guaranteed loan officers **Greg Stevens** (left) and **Scott Nista** take a quick break at a dumpsite in Jefferson Parish, La. They were volunteering at the dumpsite, providing such services as supervising the arrival and departure of dump trucks loaded with debris and monitoring the disposal of rotten food and other debris—all of it a byproduct of the destruction caused by Hurricane Katrina. Nista and Stevens were two of the 100+ USDA employees who have volunteered to assist in the post-hurricane recovery efforts in the Gulf Coast region. Note **Patricia Klintberg's** story on this page.—**PHOTO BY DOUG WEISMAN**

Tupac said.

She saw dump trucks chock full of toys damaged in the storm. "All of those toys belonged to someone," she said. "There were areas in the town where you could see a neighborhood had existed. The outline of the concrete foundation was visible. But there was nothing else. The houses were gone and so were the people." Over time, truck drivers began decorating their trucks with cast-off toys, Teddy Bears, Mardi Gras beads, and Harlequin dolls. "That's how they coped," she said.

During her 30-day deployment, Tupac was housed in New Orleans, 40 minutes away. "At 6

p.m. you might be estimating debris, but you had to leave then or get lost. There were no street signs and no streetlights. The only light at night were the headlights of your car," she said.

Then there is **Edgar Montalvo**, who was a victim of the hurricane and a volunteer in the restoration. He is a resident of Jefferson Parish and is a computer specialist with USDA's National Finance Center (NFC). He was evacuated three times: once to Mississippi, to Texas, and finally, to California. Then, when brush fires threatened his temporary residence in Los Angeles, Montalvo decided it was *continued on pg. 2...*



# Mike Johanns *Secretary of Agriculture*

**D**ear Fellow Employees, As we enjoy spring, the season of new beginnings, we should not forget those of us engaged in the war against terror who are fighting to bring a new beginning to the people of Iraq.

We are helping the Iraqi people build a lasting democracy that is peaceful and prosperous, that will never again be a safe haven for terrorists, and that will serve as a model for freedom in the broader Middle East. But significant challenges remain to overcome the devastation at the hands of **Saddam Hussein**—including the damage done to Iraqi agriculture.

Last November I had a chance to visit with Iraq's Minister of Agriculture. I was impressed by his optimism. He described the 30 years of neglect suffered by the agriculture sector. During the Saddam years, their agricultural scientists were unable to do such basic things as receive academic journals on agricultural research.

But revitalization is underway. President **George W. Bush** has a clear strategy for victory in Iraq structured along three tracks—political, economic, and security—to assist Iraqis in establishing a government that provides for and is accountable to its people. As he said, this strategy “incorporates every aspect of American power, with assistance from agencies across the federal government.”

USDA is one of those agencies—we've had a continuous

presence in Iraq since the first USDA advisor to the Ministry of Agriculture arrived in Baghdad in 2003. While we initially donated millions of dollars worth of food, we are now using our programs to move their agriculture sector forward. Under the Food for Progress Program, U.S. agricultural commodities are donated, sold, and the money used to help developing countries as well as emerging democracies.

A \$5 million Food for Progress donation of commodities is currently helping Iraq's poultry sector. Funds generated from the sale of \$5 million worth of U.S. corn and soybean meal is being used by the U.S. Grains Council as loan guarantees to provide much needed working capital to Iraqi farmers.

The major poultry producers in Iraq—those that represent 80 percent of production—are using those loan guarantees to buy U.S. corn and soybeans. They are able to purchase feed for about 90 days, enough for nearly two cycles of production. This in turn provides a cycle of income that is being used to update 25-year-old chicken houses as well as improve genetics.

The Iraqis are excited about the opportunity to apply new farming techniques and utilize products that increase quality and yields. USDA is proud to assist them in opening new doors to agricultural development. I thank all of you who have played a role in helping them achieve success in the agricultural arena. Your efforts are helping a most deserving people to realize their dream of establishing democracy. ■

## *We're Still Onsite...continued from pg. 1*

time to come home.

Jefferson Parish is a narrow strip of land that runs south of New Orleans and stops at the Gulf of Mexico where the Mississippi River ends. When Montalvo returned, he found his house had been flooded with muddy water and the roof was gone. The people working the pumps on the levees were evacuated—so the parish flooded. The only communications tower came down, knocking out all communication. “So the residents wired a crane to pick up signals and it worked. People were really creative,” he said.

Since the New Orleans-based NFC had relocated ahead of the storm, Montalvo's job was also gone. He lived in his car until he learned about the opportunity to volunteer for USACE.

He began work as a QA Inspector of roofing contractors in New Orleans less than a month after Hurricane Katrina hit. He checked each calculation the contractors made to insure that once the blue tarp material was cut, it would protect what was left inside salvageable homes. At that time, much of the city was deserted. “All the colors were gray. Pets were wandering around. I couldn't

believe what I was seeing,” he said.

Montalvo was housed in the Riverside Hilton with a view of the city. “The first week everything was dark. As time went by I could see the lights come on, signs of progress, like the city waking up, coming back to life,” he said. “I felt like I was doing something really good.” Later in his five-month tour of duty, he did audits for the Federal Emergency Management Agency in other parts of the state.

**Dave Campion**, a locksmith with OO's Facilities Management Division in Washington DC, was a QA Inspector of debris contractors in New Orleans. He made sure contractors sorted debris according to type, such as refrigerators—usually still loaded with spoiled food—other appliances with coolants, TVs, tires, and hazardous household materials.

Campion stayed for 60 days. “You'd see people putting their whole lives out on the curb, stuff they've had for generations or with sentimental value, sitting there just waiting for the debris team to scoop it up,” he said. “That was a challenge at first, but you get used to it.”

Getting “used to it” had a lot to do with the relentless schedule. The routine was a little like **Bill Murray's** character in the movie “Groundhog Day.” As Campion put it,

“when you get up at 4 a.m. and finish at 9 p.m., the only thing different was the traffic pattern on Saturday.”

**Scott Nista** and **Greg Stevens** left their jobs as Rural Development guaranteed loan officers in the Traverse City, Mich., office for a stint of 50 and 30 days respectively. Both men worked out of the USACE Debris Mission in Jefferson Parish.

“Everything was bad. It was different degrees of bad,” Nista recalled. “Where we were was not as bad as the Ninth Ward [a low-income housing area in New Orleans that was flooded, destroying houses, tossing them off their foundations] but compared to home, what we saw in terms of destruction was horrific.”

“Here I look through files and do outreach,” he said of his job in Michigan. “There it was nonstop morning until night, 78-hour weeks wearing a hard hat and a safety vest and manning the dumpsites.”

Stevens' duty was similar but consisted of monitoring the disposal of rotten food. “I think they picked me because I'm with USDA,” he said. He monitored the loads of rotten food brought to the landfill, which ranged from 15 to 40 tons a day. “The vol-

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# Notes *from USDA Headquarters*

Secretary **Mike Johanns**, [then] Interior Secretary **Gale Norton**, and Secretary of Health and Human Services **Mike Leavitt** announced an interagency readiness plan for the potential arrival of the highly pathogenic H5N1 avian flu virus. Its centerpiece is an enhanced national framework for early detection to ensure the protection of people, domestic poultry, and wild birds. Also in March, the Secretary announced that more than 4,000 comments received during the 2005 Farm Bill Forums are now available on USDA's website.

The Secretary released an implementation plan that outlines timelines and benchmarks for the establishment of the National Animal Identification System. He and other top USDA officials celebrated Earth Day on April 22 in events across the country, and April 19 was the first anniversary of **MyPyramid.gov**.

**Avian Flu Interagency Readiness Plan:** To prevent the spread of highly pathogenic H5N1 into domestic poultry operations, USDA and the U.S. Department of the Interior are enhancing testing of wild migratory birds in the United States. There are five specific strategies for early detection of the virus in wild migratory birds, including: investigation of disease-outbreak events in wild birds; expanded monitoring of live wild birds; monitoring of hunter-killed birds; use of sentinel animals, such as backyard poultry flocks; and environmental sampling of water and bird feces.

Because Alaska is at the crossroads of bird migration flyways, scientists believe the strain of highly pathogenic H5N1 currently affecting

Southeast Asia would most likely arrive there if it spread to North America via migratory birds. Thus, the plan recommends a prioritized sampling system with emphasis in Alaska, elsewhere in the Pacific Flyway and the Pacific islands, followed by the Central, Mississippi, and Atlantic Flyways. In 2006, USDA and its cooperators plan to collect between 75,000 to 100,000 samples from live and dead wild birds. They also plan to collect 50,000 samples of water or feces from high-risk waterfowl habitats across the United States. For more information go to [www.avianflu.gov](http://www.avianflu.gov).

## **National School Breakfast Week:**

USDA's School Breakfast Program, which was celebrated in schools around the country March 6-10, is available in 82,000 schools nationwide and serves 9.8 million children each day. "Research shows a strong connection between starting the day with a good, nutritious breakfast and improved academic performance," Secretary Johanns said. The School Breakfast Program operates in public and private schools, along with residential child-care institutions, and provides 50 million nutritious breakfasts per week.

## **Six Biobased Items Identified For Procurement:**

All federal agencies are now required to give special consideration to six biobased products when mak-

ing purchases. Generic groups of the products include: mobile equipment hydraulic fluids; biobased roof coatings; water tank coatings; diesel fuel additives; penetrating lubricants; and bedding, bed linens, and towels. USDA has invited manufacturers of qualifying biobased products to post product and contact information on the web site for the Federal Biobased Products Preferred Procurement Program at [www.biobased.oce.usda.gov](http://www.biobased.oce.usda.gov). Additional items will be added in the future.

## **Farm Bill Comment Summaries:**

Summaries of the more than 4,000 comments gleaned from last year's farm bill forums are now available on USDA's website. There are 41 general subject areas that form the basis for the summaries. Each paper includes three sections: factual background data about the topic, a summary of general opinions expressed, and a list of specific suggestions. The next step is to identify themes that warrant

further analysis. The first theme is "Risk Management."

**MyPyramid.gov:** In its first year, **MyPyramid.gov** logged over 1.7 billion hits. Over one million individuals are now enrolled users of the site's tool that allows each person to analyze his or her individual eating and physical activity. "We designed **MyPyramid.gov** with several goals in mind," said Secretary Johanns. "First we wanted the new pyramid to reflect the latest, most credible science as reflected in the 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans. Second, we sought to individualize and personalize the food guidance. And finally, we wanted to extend its reach to a wider, more diverse audience by building on the experience of our traditional partners." The American Society of Nutrition says **MyPyramid.gov** helps Americans make better food choices by moving away from a 'one size fits all' message to a more personalized approach to healthy eating.

—PATRICIA KLINTBERG



Secretary **Mike Johanns** (center), flanked by [then] U.S. Department of the Interior Secretary **Gale Norton** (left) and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Secretary **Mike Leavitt**, makes a point during their announcement, on March 20, of an interagency readiness plan for the potential arrival in this country of the highly pathogenic H5N1 avian flu virus.—**PHOTO BY BOB NICHOLS**

# Employees *make these things happen*

## Natural Resources And Environment

### NRCS Is Helping To Preserve, Promote "Native Heirloom Seeds"

"Sometimes I'm known as 'retro-Squanto'."

**Tom Cogger** smiled as he said that, referring to the English-speaking Patuxet Indian who helped the Pilgrims to survive during their initial years at Plymouth Colony during the early 1600s.

Cogger is based at the USDA Service Center in Ashland, Wis., where he serves full-time as the Natural Resources Conservation Service's liaison to the Bad River and Red Cliff Bands of the Lake Superior Chippewa American Indian Tribes in Wisconsin.

Lately he has been assisting in an effort by those two tribal bands in Wisconsin to save, preserve, use, distribute, and promote "Native heirloom seeds."

"Our American Indian ancestors," Cogger explained, "used to save the seeds from the crops they grew, and when they planted crops they relied on traditional, natural, environmentally-friendly methods of planting and harvesting. So, in the process, over many generations the stocks of seeds they developed—which we call 'Native heirloom seeds'—continually produced crops which they considered healthier and more nutritious than their commercial counterparts."

"But in recent years," he continued, "on some reservations American Indians began to move away from the use of their 'Native heirloom seeds' and, at the same time, began relying on chemical fertilizers and pesticides in their planting. Also, many start-

ed changing their diets, reflecting our high-fat, sugar-soaked, fast-food society of today."

This has led to modern-day Indians who tend to exhibit diet-related health problems more frequently than in past generations.

"So that's why there's a movement afoot to get back to the use of 'Native heirloom seeds' and all that that represents," he affirmed. "I'm working with our Tribes in Wisconsin to make that happen." Thus, his lighthearted reference to "retro-Squanto."

Cogger said that, to his knowledge, this is the first time that NRCS has been involved in saving, preserving, using, distributing, and promoting Native heirloom seeds.

In Wisconsin the planting of "Native heirloom seeds" is resulting in "heirloom vegetables" such as Mandan squash, Brandywine tomatoes, Arikara yellow beans, Hopi orange pumpkins, Potawatomi pole beans, Pawnee shell beans, Cherokee Trail of Tears beans, and Bear Island Minnesota flint corn. These "heirloom vegetables" are becoming more available through a project located on the Bad River Band Indian Reservation.

Cogger's role has been to provide technical assistance. For instance, he developed a "Hoophouse garden." That's a 4' by 10' raised garden bed in a wooden box which contains an enriched soil mixture he developed. The name refers to the plastic hoops which provide a frame over the wooden box, and over which are placed plastic coverings to protect the plants from early-season frost.

"The soil mixture in these Hoophouse

gardens helps to grow the heirloom veggies better than the native soils on the Reservation," he said. "That helps first-time gardeners have a more successful garden right away, until they get more experience and can use their native soils more successfully."

Last year Cogger helped propagate 500 heirloom vegetables. In addition, he developed a "Community Garden Guide Sheet" on how to build a Hoophouse garden box.

He said the Hoophouse gardens are getting a lot of support on the Indian Reservations where he provides assistance. "That's something I've been emphasizing," he said, "and I'm glad to see that it's working out."

"Our intent," he underscored, "is that, as we are able to propagate more Native heirloom seeds, we'll make those available to the tribal community—as we continue to work to save, preserve, use, distribute, and promote Native heirloom seeds here in Wisconsin."

—RON HALL



NRCS's Tom Cogger cradles a tray of Brandywine tomatoes—which he is growing from "Native heirloom seeds." —PHOTO BY JULIA BRAUN

## Research, Education, And Economics

### NASS Survey Targets Agricultural Theft And Vandalism In Hawaii

Farmers and ranchers across the country have been reporting a rash of stolen farm materials and commodities plus acts of vandalism on farm and ranch property. But reliable data and statistics, spelling out the extent of the problem, have been hard to come by—if they even existed at all.

So farmers and ranchers in Hawaii recently turned to the National Agricultural Statistics Service to measure how severe this problem was in The Aloha State.

"Officials from the Hawaii State Department of Agriculture and the Hawaii Farm Bureau Federation contacted me," explained **Mark Hudson**, NASS's Hawaii Field

Office Director, based in Honolulu. "They were planning to go to our state legislature to address this problem."

"But first, they came to us," he pointed out, "because they wanted a reliable, unbiased source—our NASS office—to conduct an in-depth survey, in order to get a better idea of the extent of the thievery and vandalism affecting our farmers and ranchers."

This would be a statewide survey, not part of any nationwide surveys which NASS conducts, as part of its mission. "This would be a 'Reimbursable Survey,' which meant that our NASS survey would be produced with funds from the Hawaii State Department of Agriculture, and would be cosponsored by the Hawaii Farm Bureau Federation."

Accordingly, Hudson and **Steve Gunn**, Deputy Director of NASS's Hawaii Field Office, put together a team of three employees, to include a statistician, a statistical assistant, and a student summer intern. "We first determined what we wanted the layout of our survey to measure," explained Gunn. "Then," added NASS statistical assistant **Elyse Taka**, "we designed our survey to include 36 detailed questions."

NASS surveyed 1,127 farm and ranch operations—out of an estimated 5,500 farm and ranch operations in the state. The NASS team then pored over the survey responses and came up with a number of conclusions—all for 2004—including:

- 1 Farmers and ranchers in Hawaii



# Editor's Roundup *USDA's people in the news*



**Kathy Tighe** is the Deputy Inspector General in USDA's Office of Inspector General.

Before joining USDA, from 1995 until she was selected for this position Tighe served as Counsel to the Inspector General at the U.S. General Services Administration. She was an Assistant Counsel for OIG at GSA from 1991-95.

From 1988-91 Tighe worked as a trial attorney with the Fraud Section of the Commercial Litigation Branch at the U.S. Department of Justice, where she litigated civil cases under the False Claims Act that involved the Department of Defense, USDA, and other federal departments and agencies. From 1983-88 she was an attorney in private practice in Vienna, Va., with the law firm of Lewis, Mitchell & Moore, where she concentrated on govern-

ment contracts. She served from 2002-04 as the Chair of the federal Council of Counsels to the Inspector General.

**Joyce Fleischman**, USDA's previous Deputy Inspector General, retired from that position following 30 years of federal service and now resides in the Northern Neck of Virginia. ■



**Mike Young** is the Associate Director of the Office of Budget and Program Analysis.

From December 1994 until his selection for this position Young served as Director of OBPA's Budget Control & Analysis Division, where he was responsible for overseeing budget formulation and execution processes for 12 years worth of USDA budgets. From 1984-94 he worked as an OBPA program analyst for research and education programs, after hav-

ing worked as a budget analyst in OBPA during 1983.

Earlier during 1983 Young was a budget analyst with the U.S. Department of Commerce. He began his federal career in 1979 as a budget analyst with the Veterans Administration.

**Larry Wachs**, the previous Associate Director of OBPA, retired from that position following nearly 44 years of federal service. This included over 31 years with USDA—and all of that was with OBPA. ■



**Bryce Quick** is the Deputy Administrator of the Food Safety and Inspection Service.

From April 2002 until his selection for this position Quick served as FSIS's Assistant Administrator for Public Affairs, Education, and Outreach. He was Director of the agency's Congressional and Public Affairs Office

from 2001-02.

Quick was Director of Business Development for Green2go. com, a Miami-based business platform for buying and selling nursery products, from 2000-2001. From 1999-2000 he served as the senior legislative representative for the American Bankers Association, after having worked from 1998-99 as Director of Legislative Affairs for the American Nursery and Landscape Association. He was a professional staff member with the Committee on Agriculture in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1995-98, where he concentrated on agricultural appropriations and farm bills, after having worked as a legislative assistant for [then] U.S. Rep. **Tom Foley** (D-Wash.) from 1990-95, focusing on foreign affairs and banking issues.

**Linda Swacina**, the previous Deputy Administrator of FSIS, is now the Executive Director of FSIS's Food Safety Institute of the Americas, based in Miami. ■

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reported \$2 million in stolen farm commodities, materials, and other property, including \$839,000 in stolen farm machinery and equipment, \$562,000 in stolen crops, \$262,000 in stolen livestock, and \$55,000 in stolen chemicals and/or fertilizer.

② Farmers and ranchers in Hawaii also reported \$2 million in vandalism to farm property. That included \$1 million in vandalism to crops; \$465,000 in vandalism to farm machinery and equipment; \$299,000 in vandalism to livestock—which normally took the form of damaging, injuring, or killing livestock—and \$4,000 in vandalizing chemicals and/or fertilizer—which usually meant contaminating or destroying those items or the equipment containing them.

③ Farmers and ranchers reported spending \$7.4 million for security on their farms and ranches. That included \$3.8 million on fences, locks, and other physical barriers; \$1.6 million on security guards; over \$1 million on installation and maintenance of farm-and ranch-related security systems; and \$573,000 on security dogs.

"To our knowledge, this agricultural theft and vandalism survey is the first of its kind that NASS has conducted," Hudson said.

The Hawaii NASS field office published its survey results in a document titled "Hawaii Agricultural Theft and Vandalism" and dated Oct. 18, 2005. The results are available on [www.nass.usda.gov/hi/speccrop/agthefta.htm](http://www.nass.usda.gov/hi/speccrop/agthefta.htm)

So, what's next, if anything?

Hudson said that the results of this NASS survey are already being utilized by Hawaii state legislators who are looking at ways to strengthen both law enforcement techniques and penalties, to combat incidents of agricultural theft and vandalism.

He added that the NASS survey is being used by the University of Hawaii College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources Extension Service, in order to develop statewide educational programs for farmers and ranchers, focusing on these problems.

Does NASS plan to conduct similar surveys, focusing on agricultural thievery and vandalism faced by farmers and ranchers, in other states or even nationwide?



"I think our state legislature will be able to make good use of these survey results," notes NASS's **Elyse Taka** (center), as she and NASS's **Steve Gunn** (left) and **Mark Hudson** pore over the findings from their survey. —PHOTO BY ARTHUR OSAKI

"At present we don't have any such plans to do so nationwide, and I'm not aware of any other states which are planning such a survey statewide," said **Dave Aune**, Chief of NASS's Statistical Methods Branch.

"However, with the increased visibility of that NASS survey in Hawaii, some states—whose farmers and ranchers have been coping with similar high levels of ag theft and vandalism—might decide to contact their NASS office and pursue that option."

—RON HALL



**T**he page one story in this issue of the **USDA NEWS** focuses on how USDA employees from

around the country have been volunteering to travel to the Gulf Coast, especially to hard-hit areas of New Orleans. There—often for weeks at a time—they’ve been onsite, assisting in ongoing recovery efforts, in the aftermath of the devastating blows inflicted on that region by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita late last summer.

But there are other ways in which USDA employees have been aiding victims of those two deadly hurricanes. For **Bill Charles**, it involved an inheritance.

Charles lives in Bailey, Colo., where he is the Assistant Director of the Agricultural Marketing Service’s Meat Grading and Cer-

tification Branch for Nebraska.

Charles’s parents had lived in Houston until his mother passed away in 1994 and his father passed away in July 2005. Charles and his sister, **Tammy Patterson**, subsequently inherited their parents’ home and possessions.

“We’re both grown, of course, and we have our own homes and our own furniture,” Charles recounted. Their father had sold his car before he had passed away, and, for now, they are both keeping the house. “So, early on, my sister and I both shared the same thought: we’d like to donate our parents’ furniture and their other possessions to someone who could genuinely use it.”

They had initially thought about simply donating the possessions to a standard non-profit charity. “But, sometimes,” he observed, “when you work through a ‘middle man,’ the out-

come doesn’t always turn out to be what you’d like it to be. So we decided to hold off for awhile and just leave the furniture in our parents’ home for the time being.”

Then Hurricane Katrina wreaked havoc on the Gulf Coast region on August 29, 2005. Over three weeks later, on September 24, Hurricane Rita socked some of the same general areas.

In late October Charles got a phone call from his sister who lives in Houston. She said that her church had some new members: a family which had relocated from New Orleans because their home had been demolished, following Katrina. The husband, wife, and their three kids were living in temporary housing, but they literally had no possessions. “Essentially the family was starting over with nothing,” he said.

“My sister and I realized right away: giving this family the furniture and the possessions from my parents would be just what we had in mind,” Charles affirmed. “And it would also be in keeping with some of the ‘good will’ lessons which our parents had taught us when we were growing up.”

Accordingly, his sister, working with volunteers from her church, arranged to have the furniture—including items from their parents’ living room, dining room, two bedrooms, a breakfast room, and clothes that had been stored in their parents’ garage—delivered to the intended recipients.

How much was that furniture worth?

“I really don’t have any idea,” Charles said. “But I know that my mom always bought her furniture from the Ethan Allen Furniture

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## PROFILE PLUS *More About: Bruce Knight*



**T**he Chief of the Natural Resources Conservation Service hasn’t had a bad day since he started in May 2002. “I’ve always hoped to have the opportunity to do this job,” said South Dakota native **Bruce Knight**. “For the past 10 to 15 years I wanted to be Chief of NRCS.”

During the time he was longing to head the most important conservation agency in America, Knight earned his spurs in agricultural policy working for the National Association of Wheat Growers, various members of Congress, and most recently as Vice President of Public Policy at the National Corn Growers Association.

Knight explained the allure of the top job at NRCS: “It was and is the chance to bring my own conservation ethic to the challenge of managing this conservation agency. We’ve had 70 years of conservation work. This is an agency that was born in the New Deal, during the Dust Bowl of the 1930s, when it was solely about soil conservation and how to respond to a massive problem. Now we are in full evolution, managing a very comprehensive conservation portfolio that includes soil, water, air, and wildlife, with a unique mix of programs that have matured over 70 years with technical assistance and financial assistance but without creating a cycle of dependency on subsidies.”

A self-described “walk-around” manager, Knight lives the NRCS unofficial credo: “The worst day in the field is better than your best day in the office.” He makes a point of visiting field offices and NRCS employees when he travels, which is 50 percent of the time. In a recent survey, producers in several Conservation Security Program pilot watersheds ranked NRCS employees very high for professionalism and courteous service in carrying out that program. “NRCS employees are the agency’s greatest strength and this national customer satisfaction survey affirms our confidence in their ser-

vice,” Knight said.

NRCS has responsibility for 22 programs, none more interesting than the popular Conservation Security Program created by the 2002 farm bill. “People like it. We get good reviews because we reward leading edge conservation efforts,” he said. However, Congress has changed the program six times since 2002 and funds for its implementation have not always been a sure thing. Still Knight thinks the concept of paying producers who implement and install practices that reduce an operation’s environmental footprint on the land is here to stay.

Knight grew up on a farm in South Dakota where the major crops were wheat and cattle. Today, the land is planted in longer rotations of corn, soybeans, wheat, grain sorghum, and oats, using no-till and a rest rotation grazing system for the cattle. “That’s another reason I love this job. I live what I advertise. These conservation-friendly practices have increased our yields and decreased our costs,” he said.

**Last Books Read:** “*The Worst Hard Time, The Untold Story of Those Who Survived the Great American Dust Bowl*,” by **Timothy Egan**. “*Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*,” by **J.K. Rowling**. “I read one chapter a night to my son and he measures my road time by ‘chapters not read,’” Knight said.

**Last Movie Seen:** “*The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*.”

**Hobbies:** Hunting, fishing, camping with the kids.

**Favorite Weekend Breakfast:** Fried eggs, bacon, and hash browns—over the campfire.

**Priorities In The Months Ahead:** “Our number one priority is to complete implementing the 2002 Farm Bill. We have \$6 billion in investments to put on the ground between now and the expiration of the bill. We want to make sure our investments are fully made.”

—PATRICIA KLINTBERG



Store chain, so I know that it was quality furniture.”

Did he have to fill out any paperwork or concern himself with any liability issues, as part of this donation?

“If a family member sat in one of the donated chairs and broke it, I don’t think they would have sued us,” he laughed. “When you’re trying to help people and they know

it, they also know you’re not trying to exploit them.”

“It’s like that movie that came out in 2000,” he then added. “It starred **Kevin Spacey** and **Haley Joel Osment**, and it was called ‘Pay It Forward’. You do a good deed for someone, and then that person does one for somebody else, and so on. So I’m sure that this family is going to care for

someone else sometime in the future.”

A few days later his sister received a thank-you card from the family, addressed to Charles and her.

“I have a copy of that card, and it’s a nice memory,” Charles said. “And I know my parents would be proud that we had carried their values forward.” ■

—**RON HALL**

#### **We’re Still Onsite...continued from pg. 2**

ume had to be categorized to avoid overloading the dump,” he said. One ton equals 2,000 lbs.

Still he said, “It was an outstanding opportunity to pitch in. A great honor for us to go down and serve others in need.” Nista was struck by the kindness of local residents. “They were so nice, so grateful. I bet I was asked out to dinner at people’s homes about 300 times.”

**Laura Davis**, a soil conservation technician with the Natural Resources Conservation Service Office in Beckley, W.Va., was assigned to a Field Office in New Orleans where she initially worked the debris mission. “This included inspecting loads as they were being gathered in the street, writing the landfill ticket, and insuring safety by USACE guidelines. I chased debris haulers for about 7 days. The haulers have to have a ticket from us before they leave the neighborhood. So as a govern-

ment inspector, we were in great demand,” Davis said.

Ultimately she moved to the “Leaners and Hangers” crew. Their job was to remove damaged trees from public streets and to trim hanging trees.

“The tree mission expanded to nearly 20 crews and I became the Team Leader. My telephone rang off the hook, 12 hours a day, 7 days a week. I dealt with many an irate homeowner; upset, worn-out crews; and burned-out government employees. I shut crews down when in violation and held roadside ‘safety meetings’ with discussions on proper flagging, steel-toed boots, hard hats, public outreach, fraud, and so on.” At the end of her 60-day tour Davis said, “Our field office removed enough debris to have filled up the Superdome 12 times.”

**Alice Welch**, Team Photography Leader with USDA’s Office of Communications, worked the Public Affairs Mission, dealing with reporters and private citizens’ inquiries, writing stories and taking photographs for the USACE newsletter, documenting the USACE’s opening of a temporary campus for historically black college Southern University of New Orleans, organizing USACE’s photographic database for archiving, and taking photographs that showed progress in affected areas.

That required a lot of time on the road. One of the people Welch met along the way was **Elizabeth Narofsky**, an agricultural commodity grader for the Agricultural Marketing Service based out of Richmond, Va. Narofsky served as a Debris Crew Leader for 90 days. That



*“I think we’re ready for the Household Hazardous Materials Removal Team to come onsite,” affirms **Walter Greene** (right), a tobacco inspector with AMS based in Lexington, Ky. He is conferring with **Elizabeth Narofsky**, an AMS agricultural commodity grader based in Richmond, Va., about how to safely remove asbestos from a residence in Plaquemines Parish, La., that had been demolished by Hurricane Katrina. —**PHOTO BY ALICE WELCH***

experience gave her a unique perspective on what made the experience as a volunteer so special to so many.

“You cannot come here and not be changed by everything you have seen, by the incredibly dedicated people you work with, and by the everyday courage of people just trying to live a normal life again,” she said.

For its part, USACE is extremely grateful for USDA’s contribution. “The volunteers that have come from the Department of Agriculture have been outstanding and have enabled our people to take a rest and refresh themselves,” said Col. **Dwight Pearson**, Commander Forward, Louisiana Recovery Field Office in Baton Rouge. “This is a difficult environment to work in continually because the amount of work that needs to be done is enormous. We thank USDA for their support and hope to welcome many more volunteers in the future.” ■



*“So, it looks like we’ll both be working in ‘Debris Quality Assurance’ in Covington, Louisiana,” confirms **Gary Boring** (center), a resource conservation and development coordinator with NRCS based in Wytheville, Va. He and **Kerry Robinson** (right), a hydraulic engineer with NRCS based in Greensboro, N.C., are receiving their assignments from U.S. Army Corps of Engineers debris safety officer **Pem Paul**, after having reported onsite in Baton Rouge and checked in for ‘post-Katrina’ volunteer duty.—*

**PHOTO BY ALICE WELCH**

The **USDA NEWS** is published by the Office of Communications, the U.S. Department of Agriculture. This employee news publication, which is prepared by, for and about this Department’s employees, is distributed to USDA’s 101,800 federal employees—full-time, part-time and temporary—by order of the Secretary of Agriculture. Mailing address is Rm. 412-A Whitten Bldg.; OC, USDA; 1400 Independence Ave., SW; Washington, D.C. 20250-1300.

To update your mailing address or change the quantity of **USDA NEWS** copies received in your USDA office, please contact your agency’s mailing/distribution specialist.

<b>Ron Hall</b>	Editor
<b>Arabella Juarez</b>	Visual Project Manager
<b>Mary Adams</b>	Printing and Distribution Coordinator
<b>Charles Hobbs</b>	<b>USDA NEWS</b> Internet Coordinator

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**Edgar Montalvo**, a computer specialist with USDA's National Finance Center in New Orleans, is standing in front of what remains of a communications tower in Jefferson Parish, La. It crashed during the onslaught of Hurricane Katrina, knocking out all communications in the parish. However, Montalvo noted, residents wired a crane (background) to pick up communications signals and serve as a temporary antenna. USDA employees such as Montalvo have been serving in similar creative and useful ways as volunteers in hurricane-affected areas, helping the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in its recovery efforts in the Gulf Coast region. Note **Patricia Klintberg's** story on page 1.—**PHOTO BY BOBBY WHITAKER**



### HELP US FIND **Sultan Jake Ciloglu**

Missing: **4-4-2005** From: **Georgetown, CA**  
D.O.B. **9-19-2000** Sex: **Male**  
Hair: **Lt. Brown** Eyes: **Brown**  
Height: **3 ft. 1 in.** Weight: **37 lbs.**

*If you have information, please call*

**1-800-843-5678**

NATIONAL CENTER FOR MISSING AND EXPLOITED CHILDREN

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Atlanta, Ga.

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[www.csrees.usda.gov/nea/family/cyfar/cyfar.html](http://www.csrees.usda.gov/nea/family/cyfar/cyfar.html)

### ■ Month of May

*Asian Pacific American Heritage Month*

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### ■ Month of June

*National Gay and Lesbian Pride Month*

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